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THE CURSE.

BY MISS ELIZA A. DUPUY.

"I should like to know the history of this," said I, raising a long glossy ring of hair, which lay in a small jewel-box, in the neatest corner of my aunt's well-arranged drawers. A shade passed over her placid face, and her voice trembled as she said—

"It is the dearest relic I possess of a valued friend. Not a day passes, that I do not look on it, and call to mind the last hour it shaded her lovely brow.—If you wish to hear her history, my dear, I will, this evening, read you a sketch of her life. Her picture hangs in my private sitting-room."

I thanked her, and immediately called to mind a portrait, with a curtain before it, which my aunt never allowed any one to raise;—years had intervened since she had looked on it herself.

"My dear girl," she added, "you have frequently wished to see that portrait. Go now, and satisfy your curiosity;—go and look on the image of one who, in beauty and goodness, was little inferior to angels—and prepare yourself to listen to her story."

I required no second permission, and in a few moments I was standing before the mysterious picture;—the curtain drawn back, and my eyes riveted on the loveliest face I had ever beheld. The portrait was that of a girl in the bloom of youth, and the countenance was radiant with life, hope, and joy. It seemed to me to demand something more than the mere epithet of beautiful. A proud impassioned spirit beamed from the dark eyes, and a smile with more of tenderness than mirth in it, slightly curled the deep red lips. I gazed on this glorious creature with unsated delight, until the approach of night concealed her from my view, and my thoughts recurred to the promised narrative.

On entering my aunt's room, I was surprised at her appearance. A bright fire burned on the hearth, and her work-stand was drawn before it, on which she leaned, with her hands clasped over her brow. Two candles, with nodding wicks, were casting their feeble light over her person, and several sheets of closely written paper, lay on a chair beside her. On hearing the noise I made at my entrance, she raised her head, and said—

"Is it you already? I did not think it so late."

Her face was deathly pale, and her lips quivered with suppressed emotion. She pointed to a seat near the fire, which I took in silence; for I was too much surprised to speak, at such evident tokens of suffering from one I had thought incapable of feeling violent passions of any description.—My aunt belonged to that reprobated class yclept 'old maids;' and I had adopted the idea, that, [illegible] some, and possessed a large fortune at her own disposal. I, of all creatures, had the least right to suppose this, for she was my friend, my benefactress, and, from my early childhood, had bestowed on me the care of an affectionate mother. After a few moments, spent in endeavoring to compose herself, she took up the papers, and carefully arranging them, said—

"I did not suppose the sight of these could have agitated me thus. I thought time had stilled the pulses that throbbed almost to madness, when the events here recorded took place."

She then proceeded to read the following story:—

It was late on a cold evening in November, in the year 18—, that the mistress of one of the first boarding-schools in Philadelphia, was informed that a gentleman wished to speak with her. On entering the parlour, Mrs Bentham found a tall, elegant looking man, in the prime of life, who immediately addressed her with the ease of one who had been familiar with the most polished society. He held a girl of twelve years of age by the hand, and he informed Mrs Bentham that he wished to place the child under her care.

"You will find her wild and untutored," he remarked, "for she has had no mother to watch over her infancy, and I fear she has been sadly neglected, as circumstances have rendered it impossible for me to have her under my own eye."

There was a slight tremor in his voice as he uttered these words, which insensibly interested Mrs Bentham, and she assured him that, with proper management, any evil habits the little girl had formed would be easily counteracted.

"I leave her entirely to you, madam," replied the stranger. "My habits are so desultory, that it is impossible for me to say when I can have her with me. Indeed, it is probable I shall not be able to see you again for some years. I will pay the expenses of the first three years in advance: and, if I should not be here at the end of that time, I will send you an order on Messrs.——, for any additional expense that may be incurred during that period, and after it has expired. It is my wish, madam, that my daughter shall have every advantage your seminary affords."

All preliminaries were speedily settled, and the daughter of the stranger (who called himself Mr Floyd) was received as a pupil in the school.—Genevieve Floyd was a sprightly child, and improved rapidly in every branch of education. She remained with Mrs Bentham five years, and, in that time, her father had never visited her, though she heard constantly from him, and Mrs Bentham's bills were regularly discharged. At the age of seventeen, she was as beautiful a fairy as ever tripped over a moon-lit lawn. She was spirited and intelligent, with a most affectionate and ingenuous disposition. She was the favorite of the whole school; but there was one among her young companions who claimed her most devoted friendship.

Mary Adams was an orphan, and a wealthy heiress. She had no pretensions to the surpassing beauty of Genevieve, or the sprightliness of her mind, but she was a gentle, pretty creature, with much deeper feelings than she was generally thought to possess. The two girls were of the same age—and, Genevieve having no home of her own to go to, had been in the habit of spending her vacations with her friend. She now began to look forward to the time when her father would take her from school, as her studies were nearly all completed; and she could not help feeling some surprise at his silence on the subject. The close of the last session came, and Genevieve had not heard from him for some months. She accompanied Miss Adams to the residence of her guardian, hoping while there to receive a summons from her mysterious parent, to his own abode. Mary Adams was to return to school no more, and she was anticipating with eager delight her introduction into society.

"You have never seen my cousin Charles?" said Miss Adams to her young companion, a few mornings after their arrival in Baltimore. "During all your former visits he was absent at college."

"No, I have never seen him," said Genevieve; "I am glad he is coming. From your description of him, I expect to see quite a *preux chevalier*."

"Do not anticipate too much; you may be disappointed. He is now in the army, and is stationed at Fort McHenry, so we shall see him quite often. I think Charles Melton handsome and interesting—but then he is my cousin you know, and it is so natural to be partial to the only relative I have ever known."

"It is indeed!" said Genevieve, sighing deeply. "I wonder if father ever thinks of me;—I have the most perfect recollection of him, though so long a time has passed since I last saw him. I remember the last kiss he gave me: when he turned away, there was a tear on my forehead. That tear comforts me now amid all his neglect. It tells me that he had for me a parent's feelings; and often I dream he is again clasping me to his heart, and that hot tear falling on my brow. Mary, you do not know how desolate I sometimes feel."

Mary threw her arms around her friend's neck, and kissed away the tear that slowly rolled over her cheek, as she said:

"Dear Genevieve, while I live you can never feel the want of a friend."

"Never, I hope. Were your friendship to fail me, Mary, I should be a wretch indeed."

At that moment, Miss Adams was summoned to the drawing-room to receive her cousin, who had just arrived. As soon as Genevieve could compose herself, and drive the cloud from her brow, she joined the party below. When she entered the room, she saw a young man standing before Miss Adams, with both her hands clasped in his own, and his strikingly intelligent face lighted up with the most brilliant animation. Mary's cheek wore the flush of excitement; and her eyes sparkled with more than usual pleasure as she presented the two beings, most dear to her on earth, to each other.

"I am sure you will love Genevieve," she said to her cousin the next morning. "And I am so glad she was not disappointed in you."

"Love her!" exclaimed Melton—"such an angel should be adored. I have never before seen any creature so transcendently beautiful!"

"Always in raptures, Charles," said Mary, with a smile—but it was a faint one; and she knew not why it pained her to hear Melton bestow such enthusiastic praise on one she herself so truly loved. She had not yet become familiar with the workings of that most mysterious of all things—the human heart. She knew not that she had to feel that bitterest of all convictions to a proud woman—that the heart, with its green, unwithered affections, may be given to one who would cast it from him as the most valueless of all possessions. Her cousin had unconsciously become more to her than all the world beside; but it was long before Mary dis- loved him—that she had been jealous of her dearest friend; the whole world appeared to her a hideous desert; and she would gladly, in that hour of deep suffering, have for ever closed her eyes on it.

She saw that Melton loved Genevieve with all the ardor of passionate affection; and she, unconscious of Mary's attachment, gave her young heart, with its intense feelings and treasured tenderness, into his keeping without reserve. The cloud that had so frequently shadowed her bright brow was now never seen: for, in the new feelings that filled her heart, she found such unalloyed happiness, that her thoughts seldom reverted to her situation. The idea that perhaps her father might not be disposed to sanction the engagement she had conditionally formed with her lover, was sedulously driven from her mind when it did intrude and darken for an instant the bright prospect before her. She was aroused from her dream of bliss by a letter from her father; and after reading it, Genevieve wondered how she could ever have anticipated happiness, or if her heart could ever thrill with pleasure again. The letter was as follows:—

"My dear child,—for so I may call you for the last time,—Genevieve, you will say, after reading this letter, that I have never loved you; for if I *feel* what I *express*, why do I abandon you? The hand of fate separates us for ever; but the God who rules over us all, and now reads the agony of my heart, knows how dear you are to me. Child of my adored and sainted Genevieve! if I could now press you to my heart, and say *never* leave me, I should be happy—happier than I can ever hope to be. You have not seen me for years; but think not I could forbear to look on the image of her who was the realization of my earliest and my proudest dream—her whose memory is consecrated in the heart of him she blessed with her love. I have seen you when you knew not that a father was near—that his heart was keeping the unceasing watch of love over you. I have looked on your sweet young face and said' "She is all I can wish," and I felt proud that you were mine: then the bitter conviction would come that I dared not claim you;—that you, gentle and lovely as you appeared, could never soothe my aching heart by the soft accents of tenderness—tones that sound to my ear like remembered music, and carry my thoughts far, far back in the dreary past, when she whose pillow is now the cold sod, sat beside me, and gave me the assurance of unchanged love. Genevieve, you are even painfully like your mother. Attend, while I give you a sketch of her history.

"She was an orphan niece of my father's, entirely dependent on his bounty. She was all the fondest lover could wish, and I loved her wildly—madly. She returned my passion; but my father, a cruel, vindictive man, swore that we should never be united;—he turned her from his house, and she sought a home with a distant relative. I set out to make a tour of the Eastern states. I had been absent but a few weeks, when, hearing that she was ill, I listened alone to the dictates of passion, and hurried to her abode. 'Tis useless to repeat the arguments I used to convince her that we could not live apart. We were married. My father never forgave me; and on his dying bed he left me his bitterest malediction. I fled from him in his last moments, and sought a refuge from my wretchedness in the presence of her whose smile could make me forget all things else. It was there, there where I had garnered all my hopes of happiness, that the first blow was to be struck. In one little week she was borne to her grave; and I franticly grasped the sods that covered her beautiful form, and called on her to answer to my agonized prayers. When this first paroxysm was over, for hours I watched in the stupor of insanity beside her grave; vainly expecting some token from the dust beneath to whisper that my affection was seen, and my love still returned by the spirit of my angel wife. None came; and after weeks of such madness, I returned to the home in which I had last seen her. I felt as an alien to my species: henceforth the world could be as nothing to me; I had lost all sympathy with its petty cares and ambition. The first feeling of softness that came to my heart was caused by your infantile cry;—I remembered that I had *one* tie: the child of Genevieve was a precious bequest; and, for the first time since her death, I wept as I held it to my heart.

"For months I watched beside your cradle, and scarcely suffered you to be taken from my sight.—Your health declined, and I thought of the dreadful words of my father's curse: 'May all you desire be withheld—may those you love be blasted in your sight, and every hope of happiness withered by that God who is about to judge my soul!'

"These were the harrowing words of a parent, and as they were uttered I felt as if a serpent had twined itself around my heart in such tight folds as to stifle every agonized throe, and with a feeling of suffocation I turned and rushed from his room.—His curse had partly fallen, and I was blasted by its effects. I *feared* to love you, and I left you to the care of servants, and became a wanderer. My father had left me without fortune, and those who had extended the hand of friendship to me in former days now looked coldly on me. I cared not for this, I turned from them with loathing, and I felt a savage joy in freeing myself from the restraints of society. The only pleasure I possessed was occasionally seeing you, and rejoicing in your restored health and improved appearance. How I have lived and supported you since I became an outcast from society, I cannot reveal. I had amassed wealth, but recent reverses have deprived me of all I p ssessed. Enclosed is a hundred dollars—All your school expenses are paid. This is all I can do for you; and alas! it must, for your welfare, be the last time I address you. My advice to you is to enter the school in which you have been educated as an assistant teacher.

"You will not hear from me, but I shall still continue to watch over your fate. Do you remember last evening, when you promenaded with your friend in the shaded walk, you heard a footstep behind you and turned? Genevieve, it was your unhappy parent, who sought to obtain a view of that beloved face without being himself seen. I can *never* claim you. I am unworthy to call you my child, and I could not bear that your innocent heart should know what a wretch you call father."

With a sickening heart Genevieve read the well known characters, and in the agony of the moment she thought that happiness was henceforth to be a stranger to her. She remembered Charles Melton, and she shuddered as she felt that they were, in all probability, for ever separated. Would Melton marry one over whose parentage so dreadful a mystery hung? Or if he was generous, and loved her well enough to overlook that, would his proud relatives consent to the union?

In truth there was sufficient cause for her to dread a separation from the object of her affections.—Adams.

"I will tell him all," she exclaimed, 'and then bid him leave me for ever. I must teach my heart [illegible] the possession of his love."

She wrote to him, and gave him her history from her earliest recollection. She told him that had she known as much as she then did, she would never have dared to love him; and all that now remained for them both to do was to erase every recollection of past hopes and wishes from their minds, as, under existing circumstances, it was impossible for them ever to be realized. She confided her letter to the care of Miss Adams and returned to Philadelphia. She revealed to Mrs Bentham all it was necessary for her to know, respecting her situation, and followed the advice of her father in seeking employment in her school.

The benevolent lady wept over her altered prospects, but she was pleased to keep her with her, for the affection she felt for the unprotected girl was like that of a mother. Genevieve, in the exercise of her duties, sought to her tranquility but alas! the wounded heart is not so easily schooled into forgetfulness. She was no longer the joyous creature whose blithe laugh and gay song thrilled the pulses of the listener with a feeling akin to their own buoyancy. Her step was languid, and her eyes had lost all their brilliancy.

In the meantime, Miss Adams had seen her cousin and given him the letter, and Mary bitterly upbraided her own heart when she felt that it rejoiced in the blow that awaited him. Genevieve had refused to marry him, and now Melton might love her, and she glossed over the selfishness of her feelings by trying to convince herself that, situated as things were, it would be impossible for them to be happy even if they were united. Her cousin, she knew, was not in circumstances to marry without the consent of his uncle, and that consent, she well knew, would never be given to his uniting himself with Genevieve Floyd. Mary's affection for him was too devoted to be entirely disinterested. She wished and prayed for his happiness, but it must emanate from herself; and, for the first time, she suffered a feeling of bitterness to mingle with her affection for her friend.

"Had he never seen her he would have loved me," she exclaimed, "and Genevieve would have been saved from an unfortunate attachment."

She was not convinced of the futility of her hopes until she witnessed the anguish Genevieve's letter inflicted on Melton. He did not attempt to conceal it, but consulted with her on the possibility of overcoming Genevieve's too scrupulous delicacy, and prevailing on her to become his wife, even without the consent of his relations.

"But your situation, dear Charles, said Mary, "your pay will not support yourself, how then can you encumber yourself with a wife?"

"True, true," replied Melton, "I wonder what my uncle placed me in the army for, if not to render me more entirely dependent of his bounty.—Mary, I must marry this girl—my happiness depends on it. If ruin and Genevieve were on one hand, and the most splendid destiny, the world can bestow on the other, I would turn from it, and, clasping her to my heart, endure without shrinking, all the bitterness of penury. I will see her, at all events, and be guided by her in the course I shall pursue."

He did see her, and moved by his anguish, and blinded by the mists of passion, she listened to his entreaties for a private marriage. He offered her a heart that adored her, and a home hallowed by love, and when she thought of her lonely and desolate situation, without the ties of kindred affection, is it wonderful that her resolution wavered?

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The first beams of the morning sun were reflected in the eastern windows of one of the principal churches in Philadelphia, and partially illuminated the altar, around which stood several persons, even at that unusual hour. A clergyman in his long black robes stood at the altar, with an open book before him. His hands were clasped, and his eyes raised to Heaven—his lips moved, but no sound issued from them, as he invoked a blessing on the two he was about to unite through weal or wo.—Before him, stood a gentleman supporting the form of a lady who appeared ready to sink with agitation and terror.

"Genevieve, dearest, why this fear?" murmured Melton, bending over her. "What causes you to tremble thus? Are you not with him you have often said you prefer before all others?"

"My father—my father!—What right have I to dispose of myself without his sanction? and thus secretly, clandestinely. Oh! Charles, have I acted right in abandoning the asylum he sought for me, and which has sheltered my childhood and youth, even to follow you?"

"Nay, Genevieve, why suffer such thoughts to intrude? Your father has no right to withhold his consent to your uniting yourself to the man of your choice. He has abandoned you to the kindness of strangers, and therefore he has no claims on your obedience. I will be more to you than you could ever have hoped him to be."

At that moment the clergyman signified his readiness to perform the ceremony, and, in the presence of one witness, who had been bribed to secresy, Genevieve Floyd, with a trembling heart, uttered the vows that bound her to Melton for ever. For a few moments after the benediction was given, all recollection of her mysterious parent, or the forebodings that had haunted her mind, were forgotten. She only knew that she had heard herself pronounced the wife of him to whom her heart had been devoted with all the fervour of a woman's love. Melton clasped her to his bosom, and murmured, in the sweet, subdued accents of tenderness,

"Genevieve, you are now my own, in the sight of that God who is now looking on us; and who shall dare to say that we have erred in uniting our fates? When your happiness, dearest, ceases to be my first care, may Heaven forsake me!"

"Amen, said a low distant voice near him.—Melton stared, and looked round to see who had uttered this startling response to his adjuration.—A dark figure, muffled in a cloak, was gliding down one of the aisles. He would have followed it, but Genevieve laid her hand on his arm, and said,

"No—no; do not pursue him. He wishes to escape notice. It must be my father, for he said he would watch over my fate. I am happy, now, dear Charles, for he knows our union, and I am sure approves it. Respect his desire for concealment, for I am sure there is some powerful motive for it."

Melton acquiesced, and they left the church and proceeded immediately to Baltimore, from which place they went a few miles to take possession of a small cottage, where, under a feigned name, they [illegible] sionally see his uncle, without being long absent from Genevieve.

His measures had been so securely taken, that even Mary Adams [illegible] her father had changed his mind respecting her continuance in the school, and showed a letter, (written for the purpose,) in which he named a particular day, on which he would send for her to join him in Baltimore. On the appointed day, a carriage arrived, with a letter of thanks to Mrs Bentham, for her care of Miss Floyd, and informed her that the writer had at length determined on taking her to his own home. Genevieve shrunk from such a course of duplicity and falsehood, but Melton reconciled her to it, by representing its necessity, as it was of the utmost importance to him that their marriage should, for the present, be concealed from every one.

Genevieve still continued her correspondence with Miss Adams; and she was pained by the tone of deep sadness that pervaded her letters. She spoke of her health as declining, and all her hopes of earthly happiness as blighted for ever. She frequently expressed a wish to see her friend, and in this desire for a re-union, Genevieve strongly participated. Desirous of gratifying every wish of hers, as far as he could with prudence, Melton determined to take her to see Miss Adams. To obviate suspicion, he first visited her himself, and hearing Mary again dwell on her wish to see Genevieve, he volunteered his services to prevail on her to visit her, as he acknowledged to Mary that he was acquainted with Genevieve's abode, and frequently saw her. Genevieve was shocked at the alteration in her friend's appearance. Mary was but the shadow of her former self: she beheld a hopeless and desponding invalid, confined to her own chamber, and wasting the best years of her life in repining over an unrequited attachment. It was not long before her penetration discovered the cause of Mary's illness and depression. She had mentioned Melton's name: The deathly paleness that overspread the face of the invalid, and the trembling tones of her voice, as she endeavoured to reply, laid bare a record of anguish and suffering, that struck Genevieve to the heart. She gazed for a moment in speechless distress on Mary, then, throwing herself on her bosom, she exclaimed,

"Oh, Mary, why did you conceal this from me? The knowledge of it would have given me strength to combat his passionate pleadings, and your happiness would have been secured. 'Tis too late now. How could I be so blind as not to have seen that it was impossible for any one to be with him as much as you were, and not love him. Will you, can you, forgive me."

"What am I to understand from your mysterious words?" said Mary, in strong agitation. "Are you his wife?" and she leaned back, nearly gasping for breath; for, unknown to herself, a faint hope had still lingered in her breast, that Melton might yet be detached from Genevieve, and in time return her affection.

"I am," said Genevieve, solemnly. "And the pure faith of a devoted heart was pledged, in placing my destiny in his care. But you will not betray us, dear Mary?"

"No! no!" said Mary, with difficulty uttering the words; "not for worlds, but how could you deceive me thus? The only two beings on earth in whom I place any confidence, to keep the knowledge of their marriage from me, as if I *could* betray them! Oh! Genevieve, this deeply wounds me."

"Dear Mary, Charles did it for the best. You see his relations frequently, and he was aware of the anxiety of his uncle to see him united to you. He feared that when inquiries were made of you, your manner might betray our secret. Believe me, 'twas not from distrusting your affection for us that we acted thus."

"Does he—does Charles suspect my unfortunate attachment?" inquired Mary, in an agitated tone.

"No, dearest Mary, such a thought has never crossed his mind, and you may feel assured that I will never hint it to him."

"Thank you, Genevieve," said Mary, more calmly than she had hitherto spoken. "Perhaps I